Chapter 21: “Turning” Notes

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# CHAPTER SUMMARY

After their victory at Vimy Ridge, the battalion Xavier is in gets sent away from the front line. After witnessing a dogfight, Elijah says, “I would give my left arm to fly in one of those aeroplanes,” and he starts to brag about how he kills Germans with such skill. However, when he tries to shoot a duck far away, he narrowly misses. Then, Xavier takes a shot and kills the duck, making sure nobody forgets about him. Xavier and Elijah go on a scouting mission and Xavier starts to learn new skills from Elijah. Xavier becomes disgusted with the war and misses Lisette badly – so bad that he slips out from his battalion to see her. However, when he meets her he finds out that she is actually a prostitute who Elijah paid to sleep with him. He returns thinking he is invisible to everyone, but he is called to Breech for his unauthorized departure. Elijah accompanies him, and translates his swearing in Cree into fake medical problems. He is put into confinement and later gets tested on his obedience.

**Why is the chapter titled “Turning”?:**

* Several situations start to change: The war turns from the Germans’ favour to the Allies’, Elijah becomes Xavier’s teacher, and the woman Xavier dearly loved turns out to be an illusion
* Up till this point, the Allies were mostly being defeated, but the victory at Vimy Ridge is significant because they finally achieve their objective of taking high ground
* After becoming a sniper and up this point, Xavier has grown accustomed to the war and is reluctant to leave the battles
* However, in this chapter, we can clearly see that Xavier loathes of the war. Finally, we see who Lisette really is.
* Elijah previously describes her as “daughter of the estaminet’s owner”, but she is in reality a prostitute who was sleeping with an officer

# SIGNIFICANT QUOTATIONS

1. **“I look around and realize that I know very few men by name anymore.” – Xavier, Page 243**

This quotation indicates that war has ensued for a while now, and it is starting to drag. Many men have come and gone. Xavier can barely remember the names of those men. Xavier feels empty after the death of so many of the original privates who were his friends have died, such as Sean Patrick and Gilberto. He may have no desire in getting to know and befriend them because he now thinks that they’re going to die and he’s going to be left alone again in the war. This is a stark contrast to Elijah’s ways. Elijah would take his time and get to know almost every one of their comrades, and be friends and crack jokes with them. Again, this is an example of Xavier and Elijah’s contrasting personalities.

1. **“In the dark of night I think that my life has been divided into three for me by the wemistikoshiw.” – Xavier, Page 245-246**

This quotation directly refers to the motif of the power of three, and how the whole lifestyle of the wemistikoshiw people revolves around the number 3. For example, there is:

* *food*, *rest*, and *women*
* The soldiers go on raids in groups of three, and often die in threes.
* There’s the *front* line, *reserve* line, and *support* line
* It’s unlucky for a soldier to take the third light

The number 3 is taking over Xavier’s life as well, because there was his life *before* the war, then *during* the war, and *coming home* after the war. He feels constricted because it’s not easy for people to adjust to a whole other routine in living, so he cannot come to terms with it. The Aboriginal people are used to living life in a circle – the Sun, Earth and Moon are all round, and the seasons pass in a circle, and the wigwam, teepee and shaking tent are all circular shaped. His inability to adjust to this lifestyle permanently might be one of things that contributes to his sense of not belonging, throughout the novel. This lifestyle is definitely not proving to be a positive experience.

# QUESTIONS

**1. Why do you think Xavier shoots the duck after Elijah misses? (Page 244)**

* Xavier needs to prove himself to the other soldiers, and possibly even Elijah, that he is capable of doing more things
* He does not want to live in Elijah’s shadow anymore, so this was a good opportunity to display his natural sniping talent

**2. Why do you think that Xavier wants to beat Elijah with his fists? (Page 253)**

* Elijah is a trickster; he played a cruel joke on Xavier, and it wasn’t the first time he played on on him
* Xavier was obsessed with Lisette, so of course he was furious when he found out that Elijah paid a prostitute to be with him
* In the war, human relationships are very important to have (the only thing keeping some soldiers sane are their wives/girlfriends/family). Lisette, being a fake person hired by Elijah, must have been a huge blow to Xavier

**3. How do you think Elijah feels being left behind for the first time? (Page 247-248)**

* The tables have turned, and their relationship is definitely turning into something else, which is new and reverberates the chapter title (Xavier finally takes things into his own hands)
* Xavier is learning how to not rely on Elijah so much, because before he would talk to Elijah about everything. He is learning how to keep his distance from his friend, especially since he played such a cruel joke on him